Chapter 1

Web Publishing Basics

In This Chapter

- Getting started with Web publishing
- Putting together a Web page the easy way — and the easier way
- Examining types of Web sites
- Reviewing Web page guidelines

The Web is an incredibly easy way to get your message — any message — out to anyone in the world who's interested in it. By putting up a Web page you can stay in touch with friends and family, entertain people, help yourself get a job, or help yourself do your job. You can start a business, grow a business, or just have fun expressing yourself.

Having a Web page is also ever more important as social networking and online selling sites — eBay, MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, and many others — continue to grow. You need a base that establishes your online presence, and any online commercial interests you have, across all the "walled gardens" that each want you to spend all your online time within their boundaries.

Nearly a million people have purchased this book since its first edition more than ten years ago; my readers have used every technique I describe in this book — and more — to get their first Web pages up and running. By reading this book, you're starting on a path that many, many people before you have followed to Web-page success.

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Web Basics 101

You may have begun using the Internet and the Web without really getting a chance to learn how they work. Knowing how they work can help you become a better Web publisher and Web user. Here's a brief, to-the-point description. For more information, you can search the Web; the World Wide Web Consortium site at `www.w3.org` is a good place to start. (Start with the HTML section.)

Understanding how the Web works

The Web, formally called the *World Wide Web,* is a collection of a bunch of text and graphics files (plus some other stuff) that make up *Web pages.* Web pages are combined into linked sets of pages called *Web sites.* People often use the term interchangeably, but technically, a Web page is a single HTML text file, possibly with one or more graphics and other features added; a Web site is one or more Web pages linked together. These terms will be explained further later in this book.

Underlying the Web is the Internet. The Web depends on the Internet to connect its many files together and to allow people to get to the Web. E-mail is a separate function that also depends on the Internet. And FTP (file-transfer protocol) is another Internet capability, used to move files from one computer to another.

The Web is defined by two specifications: HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP) and HyperText Markup Language (HTML). The underlying idea behind the Web is *hypertext* — text that can contain links to other pieces of text and other files, such as graphics files, stored anywhere on the Internet. The Web got its name from the way all the links connect the pieces of text together like a huge spider's web.

You look at Web pages by using a program called a *Web browser.* A Web browser uses HTTP to request a Web page from a Web server. The Web page, in turn, uses HTTP to request any other files, such as graphics images or ads, that are part of the Web page. After you request a Web page, your Web browser pulls the files that make up the Web page from one or more Web servers and assembles those files into a single page displayed on your screen.

The most popular Web browsers are Microsoft Internet Explorer; Mozilla Firefox (the successor to the once all-conquering Netscape Navigator); Opera, a standards-compliant Web browser from a small company; and Safari, Apple's browser for Macintosh computers.

After a Web browser requests a Web page using HTTP, HTML steps in. Each Web page has as its core a text file written in a format called *HTML* (for HyperText Markup Language), which usually includes links to one or more graphics files. HTML defines a Web page's appearance and functionality. Actually, HTML doesn't precisely specify the Web page's appearance: Different Web browsers display various HTML commands differently. Also, users can specify how they want things to look on their own screen. So what one user sees when she looks at a Web page may be different from what another user sees. (Part IV goes into detail about HTML.)

Getting a Web page up on the Internet is surprisingly easy. In fact, if you're in a hurry, you may want to go straight to Chapter 3 to use Google Page Creator. Follow the instructions there to get your first Web page up in about an hour.

Getting Webbed

This book talks a lot about the Web, but doesn't discuss how to get on the Web as a user. Even if you're on the Web already, perhaps through a connection at work, you may also want to get on the Web from home. How do you do that?

There are a wide variety of broadband offerings — some tied to cable TV or satellite TV services, others to phone offerings, and even a few to mobile phones. There are wireless hotspots that may give you inexpensive (or even free) Internet access. And yes, there are still some dialup — that is to say, slow — offerings left.

The most popular online service is still America Online (AOL). AOL has robust Web-publishing features, coverage around most of the world, good spam blocking, kid-safe controls, and many other good features. However, it tends to be expensive, and is gradually losing subscribers.

It's quite likely that your Internet service provider, whether it's a big name (such as AOL and MSN) or a little guy, offers you space for your Web site — and perhaps helpful support services as well. Check your ISP's offerings as you decide how to get your first pages up on the Web.

Getting up URL-y

The Internet is the giant computer network that connects other computer networks around the world. At its base, the Internet is just a giant mechanism for moving files from one computer to another. It finds files by using a kind of address called a *URL* (Uniform Resource Locator — which sounds like something the Army invented to track down clothes!). The acronym URL is usually pronounced "you are ell," although some pronounce it "earl." Most people today use the term "Web address" or "Internet address" instead of "URL," but as a Web publisher you should know all of the terms.

The address that you type to get to a Web page is a URL. For example, `www.dummies.com` is the URL for the For Dummies site. A URL consists of three parts (see Figure 1-1):

- **Protocol:** The name of the communications language that the URL uses: HTTP (used on the Web), HTTPS (for secure Web pages), FTP, and so on.
- **Domain name:** The name of the server the file is on, such as dummies.com.
- **Pathname:** The location of the desired file on the server.

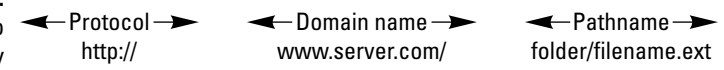

Figure 1-1: URL-y to Web, URL-y to rise.

The "For Dummies" Way to Web Publishing

Reading this book is going to make you a Web publisher — because anyone who puts up even a single, simple home page is a publisher on the World Wide Web. Congratulations in advance!

Because there's so much you can do on the Web these days, including on social networking sites such as YouTube (for videos) or Flickr (for photos), I have split the description into two basic pieces: getting your content together (Part II) and getting it up on the Web (Part III or Part IV). Part III describes how to get your Web page up using the tool included with this book, CoffeeCup; Part IV describes how to "go to the bare metal" (well, the bare fiber-optic cable) and use HTML directly.

Given the many ways you can work, and the way different Web sites and different tools handle some of the process for you, but not all of it, it's important to understand the underlying steps that define Web publishing. The steps may have different names, or be intermingled with each other, but they're always basically the same. Here they are:

1. **Create the HTML text file that's the basis for your Web page.**
2. **Create or obtain the graphic images you'll use to spice up the appearance of your page.**
3. **Create a link to the graphics in your HTML text file so they appear where you want them to.**
4. **Preview your Web page on your own machine.**
5. **Find Web-server space.**
6. **Transfer the HTML text file and the graphics files to the Web server.**
7. **Check that your new Web page works correctly now that it's online.**

If you use an easy-to-use tool such as Google Page Creator (see Chapter 3), the steps given here are combined and most of the details are handled for you. However, it's good to know what's happening "behind the scenes," to help avoid problems or to help you tackle a more complicated site later.

Web terms to know

To clear up how I define and use some Web terms, here's a brief primer:

- **Web page:** A text document that is published on a Web server, has HTML tags in it, almost always includes hypertext links, and usually includes graphics. When you click the Back button in your Web browser, you move to the previous Web page that you visited.
- **Web site:** A collection of Web pages that share a common theme and purpose, and that users generally access through the site's home page.
- **Home page:** The Web page that people generally access first within a Web site. You let people know the URL (address) of your home page and try to get other Web page creators to provide links to it.
- **HTML tags:** Brief formatting or linking commands placed within brackets in the text of an HTML file. For instance, the `<b>` tag tells the Web browser to display text after the command in bold type; the `</b>` tag turns the bold off. (See Part IV for more on HTML.)

These steps are usually simple if you're creating a basic Web page. However, they do get more complicated sometimes, especially if you're trying to create a multipage Web site. This book tells you several different, easy ways to get content up on several different kinds of sites or create a Web page, and gets you started on expanding your Web page into a multipage Web site.

When you create a Web page that has complex formatting, or that mixes text and graphics, you'll want to test it in the most popular Web browsers. You should download Microsoft Internet Explorer, the America Online client, the Firefox browser, the Opera browser, the Safari browser, and/or other tools.

For an example of a good-looking Web page, check out the For Dummies home page, shown in Figure 1-2. It has an attractive layout, interesting information, and links to a great deal more information on the For Dummies site and other sites. The For Dummies Web site is professionally done, but you too can achieve good results with a reasonable amount of planning and hard work. In this book, I concentrate on helping you create a simple, individual Web page and combining several Web pages into a closely linked group of pages called a *Web site,* such as the For Dummies site.

Note: The For Dummies home page is shown in Microsoft Internet Explorer, the most popular Web browser. For consistency, I use Internet Explorer for most of the Web-page images in this book.

Home - For Dummies - Windows Internet Explorer
http://www.dummies.com/WileyCDA/
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
Home - For Dummies
DUMMIES.COM
The Online Resource for the Rest of Us!
SEARCH
Everyday Computing
Advanced Computing
The Internet
At Home
Health, Mind & Spirit
Making & Managing Money
Sports & Leisure
Travel
Beyond the Classroom
Win a Flat Panel HDTV!
Enter to win
From Us to You!
eTips
Subscribe to our free newsletters.
Sudoku/Puzzles
Catch the Fever! Free Sudoku and Kakuro Puzzles each day!
Podcasts
Whether reading a Dummies book or listening to a Dummies podcast, when you get Dummies, you get results.
RSS
It's all free to you, so what are you waiting for?
Dummies Deals
At a store near you.
Featured Books & Articles
Focus on Networking
Adding a Wireless Print Server to Your Network
Home Networking Phone Tricks
Preparing to Install Windows Home Server
The TCP/IP Networking Protocol Suite
Resource Center
iPhone
Office 2007/Windows Vista
Adobe CS3
Solar Power Your Home For Dummies
Macs All-in-One Desk Reference For Dummies
DO-IT-YOURSELF with Dummies
Bloom with our Home & Garden page

Figure 1-2: The For Dummies home page shows Web-publishing skill.

Making simple things simple

If all you want to do is create a simple "I exist" Web page, either for yourself or for your business, you don't have to go through the rigmarole of figuring out HTML or learning a tool, finding server space, and so on. Chapter 3 helps you use Google Page Creator, a tool from the leaders in Web search, Google. To see how easy publishing on the Web is, just turn to Chapter 3 and get started. You'll be a Web publisher with just a couple of hours of effort.

Making difficult things possible

If you want to concentrate on one type of media at a time, Chapter 4 talks about writing words for the Web and shows you how to create a blog; Chapter 5 talks about creating images, especially photos, that are online-ready, and tells you how to manage photos on Flickr; Chapter 6 discusses making sound files and tunes Internet-friendly, and how to get a tune up on MySpace; and Chapter 7 focuses on videos — how to trim their massive storage requirements and get one up on YouTube.

Seeing HTML

When Tim Berners-Lee invented HTML at CERN (the European particle-physics research facility) in the late 1980s, he probably never imagined that so many people would be interested in seeing it. Today, most browsers include a command that enables you to see the actual HTML source instructions that make the page look and work the way it does.

For example, in Internet Explorer, choose View➪Source to view the underlying HTML file. You see all the HTML tags that make the Web page look and act the way it does. However, some HTML pages are "cleaner" and easier to read and understand than others. Keep looking until you find some pages that make sense to you.

After you open the HTML file, you can edit the text and the HTML tags, save the file, and then open the file again in your browser to see how it looks with the HTML changes. Don't publish someone else's page, of course — but other than that, experimenting in this way is a good way to learn.

Part III — Chapters 8 through 11 — shows you how to use the CoffeeCup editor to pull your content together into a Web site. Part IV — Chapters 12 through 15 — shows you how to do the same in "pure" HTML.

Types of Web Sites

The Web offers examples of nearly every communications strategy known to humanity, successful or not. But not every example of a Web page that you find online applies to your situation. For one thing, the resources of different Web publishers vary tremendously — from an individual putting up family photos to a large corporation creating an online commerce site. For another, several different types of Web sites exist, and not every lesson learned in creating one type of Web site applies to the others.

The major types of Web pages are personal, picture, topical, commercial, and entertainment sites. Increasingly, you can combine different kinds of sites in *mashups* — sites that combine different kinds of technologies. (The Web itself already does that, but a mashup takes combining technologies to another level.) In the next sections, I describe some of the specific considerations that apply to each type of Web page and not to the others. Decide in advance what type of Web page you want to create, and look for other pages like it online to use as models.

Personal sites

Personal Web sites can have many goals. Often, your goal is simply to share something about yourself with coworkers, friends, family, and others. Personal Web pages are a great way for people to find out about others with similar interests and for people in one culture to find out about other cultures. You can also use a personal Web site to share family photos and events — kind of like a holiday letter that's always up to date. Figure 1-3 shows part of the personal site of Web designer Jeff Lowe, who's piloting a remote-controlled blimp in the pictures. You can find the site at `www.jefflowe.com` and the blimp image among the pictures at `www.jefflowe.com/site/pictures/index.php`.

Creating a personal Web site is a great deal of fun and great practice for other work. But personal Web sites are often left unchanged after the initial thrill of creating and publishing them fades. Be different — keep your Web site updated!

As personal Web sites evolve, their creators tend to add more information about a single key interest, in which case the pages may become topical Web sites (described later). In other cases, the Web site creator adds more information about professional goals and accomplishments, in which case the Web page becomes more like a business Web site.

Figure 1-3: Jeff Lowe pilots the blimp (and posts his résumé too).

Are personal Web sites still relevant?

Most of the activity you hear about on the Web these days relates to large, commercial sites, political sites, advanced technical sites, and so on. Individuals are still contributing a great deal of content but it's through more specialized sites — photo sites, video sites, social-networking sites, and so on. But these tend to appeal to only some people rather than to everyone.

Personal Web sites have gotten somewhat lost in the shuffle as better-funded sites belonging to companies and organizations get all the attention. Never fear; personal Web sites are still fun and easy to create. (And did I mention that they're fun?)

Part of what's driving the continuing interest in personal Web pages is that more and more people all over the world have access to the Web. (The Web passed 1 billion users a few years ago, an important milestone.) The chances are better than ever that a high percentage of your friends, family, and colleagues can visit and appreciate your site. So don't be put off by the tremendous growth of business and large organizational sites on the Web. The personal and fun side is growing, too; it's just getting less media attention than the commercial side.

Following a few simple rules helps make your personal Web site more fun and less work:

- **What's on first?** No, no. What's on second . . . The upper part of your Web page — the part that appears first when you bring the page up on-screen — needs to make the main point of the site clear. If the main point is "you," the first thing people see should be your name, your photo, and links to some of the things about "you" that are in your site. If the point of your site is a topical interest, business interest, or professional self-promotion, the first area of the home page should make that clear, too.

- **Keep it simple.** Start with modest goals and get something up on the Web; then create a "To Do" list of ways in which to extend your site. Consider spinning off commercial and topical pages that reflect your desires and interests — into separate sites by topic — rather than creating a sprawling personal Web site.
- **Provide lots of links.** One of the best ways to share your interests is to share information about Web sites that you like, as well as books and other resources. You can put this list on your one and only Web page or make it a separate page that's part of a personal Web site. If you develop a thorough, carefully updated list of links for a specific interest area, you create a valuable resource for others.

- **Consider your privacy.** A Web page is just like a billboard — except that 1 billion or more people can see it, not just a few hundred. Don't put anything up on your Web page that you wouldn't want on a billboard. Identity thieves can do a frightening amount of damage with your full name, your address, the name of your employer and your mother's maiden name. And think twice before putting up information about your kids and other family members: You may well be willing to compromise your own privacy, but you shouldn't make that decision for other people.

Picture sites

Lots of people just want to share pictures online; it's a lot easier to share pictures on the Web than to mail them around, or wait until you get together with people.

You can use any of the Web-page creation tools described in this book to create a photos-mostly Web site, although Flickr (see Chapter 5) is for this purpose alone.

Sharing pictures is often a great joy, but also often quite boring for other people. Here are some tips to help keep your site interesting:

- **Get organized.** Think about how photos are going to be organized. Basically, your site should be like a magic photo album — with new content at the front, and as many older photos as you want at the back. So use the home page to highlight the new stuff, and keep the older stuff moving back into archived folders.
- **Be a photo editor.** "Less is more," up to a point, even on sites designed to show off the grandkids' latest photos to proud grandparents. Usually, one or two photos of a given spot or event, whether it's a birthday party, a visit to an historic site, or something similar, are enough to give a flavor of it.
- **Watch the megabytes.** Use a photo-editing program to save your files as JPEG images with the appropriate degree of compression (Chapter 5 has details). Even though many Web users today have broadband access, you don't want to freeze out the people who don't, and even broadband runs slowly sometimes.
- **Protect your identity.** Make sure not to provide identifying information such as anyone's full name, address, or phone number. This helps prevent identity theft.

Getting personal with blogs

A *Web log,* or *blog* for short, is a sort of online diary that usually includes links to Web sites that the user has recently found interesting — thus the term Web log. *Blogging,* or maintaining a Web log, is a whole new form of Web publishing.

You can create a Web page or Web site that's nothing but a blog, or combine blog content with traditional content. Some blogs are extremely personal — sometimes uncomfortably so. Web logs are also used in big Web sites, such as major newspaper sites. In other words, Web logs cross the boundaries between personal sites and other categories — including the topical and business categories — and some of them are pretty entertaining as well!

I have the somewhat old-fashioned view that you probably would benefit from knowing about Web-page creation in general, not just blogging, so I defer a detailed discussion of this larger topic to Chapter 4. But if your whole reason for wanting to create Web pages is to create a blog to call your very own, please skip ahead and read Chapter 4 now, and then come back here when you want to find more about Web pages in general.

Topical sites

That's "topical," not "tropical." A *topical home page* is a resource on a specific topic. A topic can be an interest or volunteer group to which the author belongs, in which case the page may grow over time into something much like a business Web site. (Creating a Web site for a group is a tremendous contribution that you can make, but it can be a lot of work; watch what you may be getting yourself into!) Or your topical Web page can be about any interest, cause, concern, obsession, or flight of fancy that you have. In this sense, the Web is like an out-of-control vanity press, allowing anyone to go on and on about anything — sometimes offering something of great value, oftentimes not.

Making a second career out of maintaining and extending a topical Web site is easy, but the pay is usually low. Here are some things to consider when you create a topical Web site:

- **What's on first?** As with a personal Web page, the title of a topical Web page and the first screen that users see need to make unmistakably clear the topic that the page covers. And, to the extent possible, they must describe what resources the Web site offers about the topic.
- **Keep focused.** A topical Web site loses some of its value if it goes beyond a single topic. How many of the people who share your love for Thai cooking also share your abiding interest in rotifers (microscopic creatures that are too small to use in most recipes, Thai or not)? If you have two different interests that you want to share on the Web, consider creating separate Web sites.

- **Create a succession plan.** If your Web site grows beyond your capacity to maintain and extend it properly, find someone to help out or to take it over. The first person you should ask about taking over is anyone who's complaining that you're not extending the site fast enough! Decide what role you can handle and then ask for help in doing the rest.

Business sites

Business Web sites, also known as commercial sites, constitute the 50,000-pound gorilla of the Web, with a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money devoted to them. Business Web sites cover a wide range of styles because their goals and the expertise and resources behind them vary so much. This book provides enough information for you to create a competent "Web presence" site with several pages of contact and company information. But even these kinds of sites vary quite a bit, and you need to be sure that your company's page is well implemented.

Figure 1-4 shows the BATCS home page I created along with my wife, Olga Smith, a publisher and tutor. It's created with an online tool provided by the Web host, and is a bit "rough around the edges" from a design point of view, but full of content useful for the purpose. Go surf around the BATCS site to see what a site designed and implemented by someone with a job to do (rather than all the time in the world to show off Web-design skills), looks like: `www.batcs.co.uk`.

The first question to ask about a business Web site is "Who can access it?" Some sites are intended for the World Wide Web and everyone on it; others are on the World Wide Web but are password-protected or otherwise restricted in access; still others are on private networks and inaccessible to outsiders. These inaccessible networks are described as being "behind the firewall." Any Web page that isn't accessible to everyone is considered to be on an *intranet,* if access is limited to one company, or an *extranet,* if access is limited to a group of companies that are business partners.

Despite the wide variety of business Web sites, following just a few rules can help you create a page that meets your goals:

- **What's on first?** A business Web page should make the name and purpose(s) of your business immediately clear. Also, the site should provide easy-to-find information on how to contact your business or organization and what products and services it offers.
- **Get the right look.** Telling someone you don't like his Web site is like telling him you don't like his haircut — he's likely to take it personally. But an ugly Web site, like an ugly haircut, can make a permanently bad impression. Make sure that the look of your Web site is up to the professional standards set by other aspects of your business.

Home - Windows Internet Explorer
http://www.batcs.co.uk/
wiley dummies
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
Home
Page Tools
Home People Courses Articles FAQ Clients Order
Home
BATCS about us
Current accent reduction course
Get Rid of your Accent book
Get Rid of your Accent customer feedback
Weekend accent reduction course
Prices
BaTCS
www.batcs.co.uk
Business and Technical Communication Services Limited, or BaTCS, is a UK Limited company
Our vision: To become a global leader in accent reduction teaching and training.
Our mission: Empower people by helping them to improve their communication skills.
We specialise in:
- Publishing "Get Rid of your Accent";
- Providing training in accent reduction to diplomats, business professionals, foreign students and British actors.
Our competitive advantage:
Internet
100%

Figure 1-4: The BATCS home page gets the job done.

- **Get permission.** Unless you own the business, you need to ask for permission before putting a company page on the open Web. You also need to make absolutely sure you have the permissions you need for any images or documents that you use before you publish your Web page.
- **Inside or outside the firewall?** Deciding who gets access is tricky. For example, a small amount of otherwise-closely-held information can make a site more valuable, but the presence of confidential information *also* prevents you from opening up the entire site to the broader public. Implementing access controls can also be difficult. Investigate how to password-protect a site, or ask a network administrator at your company whether you can physically control access. For instance, you may be able to selectively allow access based on which network the user connects from.
- **Find experts.** Businesses similar to yours — or even colleagues, if you're in a large company — likely have Web sites that have a purpose similar to yours. Look to similar sites for guidance and inspiration.

- **Monitor usage.** Investing time, energy, and money in a business Web site requires a trade-off among the Web site and other things that those resources could go to. One of the crucial questions you may need to answer in order to justify Web site maintenance or expansion is how much use the site gets. Investigate ways to measure the use of your site. A good way to start is a basic hit counter, such as the free one you can find at the following URL: `www.statcounter.com`.
- **Seek out additional resources.** This book focuses on hands-on creation of single Web pages and simple Web sites. For a larger business site, you need access to additional information to help you with the planning, hosting, and maintenance of the site. Consider purchasing *HTML, XHTML & CSS For Dummies,* 6th Edition, by Ed Tittel and Jeff Noble, for more information on the HTML specification, and *Web Marketing For Dummies,* by Jan Zimmerman (both books from Wiley), for more information on planning and creating a business Web site with a marketing bent.

Having a Web site that's too obviously "handmade," rather than professionally created, can be embarrassing for a business. However, many sites are going "back to the future" with a simple, clean look that's light on graphics. So how do you decide whether to make your look fancy or simple? The best way to get a quick reality check is to look at some competitors' Web sites and make sure that your initial site looks roughly as good as theirs. And remember: Often the most embarrassing thing is having no site at all.

Entertainment sites

Entertainment is one of the top few reasons why people use the Web, and the number of entertainment sites continues to grow. Humorous pages and shared games on online services are now a major presence on the Web.

People have high expectations of entertainment sites — which can make them some of the most demanding to create. Here are a few suggestions for creating entertainment sites:

- **Don't start here.** Don't try to figure out Web publishing by creating an entertainment site at the outset. It's a very demanding task. Try another type first and edge your way into entertainment.
- **Keep it fresh.** How funny is a joke the second time you hear it? You have to either frequently update the content on your entertainment site, or allow participants to provide new content through their interaction with one another — neither option is easy.
- **Push the technology.** Interactivity is also key to entertainment, which means going beyond HTML and static graphics. You probably need to figure out and use at least one more advanced Web technology, such as Flash, to make a fresh and interesting entertainment Web site.

Is your page cybersmut?

For most Web page publishers, the best policy with respect to putting anything potentially offensive in your Web pages is to keep your site clean. The use of gratuitous sex and violence in your Web pages will simply put off many people and put you and your Web site in a bad light.

But what if the sex or violence is not gratuitous and is actually central to your point? Then send the author and publishers your URL so that we can see it for ourselves. No, seriously: Be sure to make the first page a home page that specifically warns readers that they may find your content offensive. Doing so lets them gracefully opt out before they view whatever you show.

Also, consider your environment — the site the content appears on. MySpace pages are full of dubious content, whereas YouTube tries to keep things cleaner. A business site should not have anything potentially offensive. Don't have your content violate the local etiquette.

Even this enlightened approach may not be enough, however. Some Web-server owners will drop your page if it violates their rules, and several countries have laws that specify what can and can't be on a Web page. Be sure to find out about the rules and laws that apply to you before you put anything questionable on your Web page.

- **Let the technology push you.** The technology can give you ideas that are in themselves pretty funny. Try using Java to create a Three Stooges-type animated routine, or use ActiveX to create a virtual-reality environment that includes funhouse mirrors. (I describe both Java and ActiveX in Appendix A.)

Thinking Your Web Page Through

A Web page or Web site is basically a publication, though an interactive one. Thinking about a few simple principles now, before you start, can help make your Web page much more interesting and useful to the people who see it. You can also revisit this section after you put up your initial Web home page; use these guidelines to revise your page and make it even more interesting and useful!

Ask "Why am I doing this?"

Ask yourself, as you're starting, "Why am I doing this?" (As you do more and more work on your page, your answer to this question may come to have some degree of profanity in it!) That is, why are you creating the page, and

not having someone else create it for you? The answer helps you determine some important things about the page. The following list details the most common reasons for people to get involved in creating a Web page:

- **For work:** More and more people are being asked to create Web pages and Web sites as part of their jobs; for example, they use the Web to communicate with people inside or outside their companies. But unless you plan to be a full-time Webmaster, you need to balance the time you spend developing your pages with the time you spend on the other demands of your job. Be modest in your initial goals, and keep track of each step in creating and modifying your Web pages so that you — or the person who takes over for you — can refer to the records later.
- **For fun:** Fun sites are a good thing, and they are a lot of what makes the Web worthwhile. But if you create your site for fun, you may find time to work on it only after you spend time on other things, such as work, school, and time with friends and family. So don't be too ambitious in your initial plans, or you may take quite a while to finish and publish your page. (Many bloggers, for one example, now feel that they need to be online 24/7 to keep up.)
- **As a career move:** So you want to be a full-time, or nearly full-time, Webmaster, blogger, or eBay seller; or you want, in some other way, to make the Internet or Web part of your career? In this kind of situation, you can afford to plan an ambitious Web site that uses advanced tools, tracks usage, and otherwise gets closer to the cutting edge of the Web. To gain experience, create your initial Web page by using the accessible and broad-based tools and approaches I describe in this book. Then take your page closer to the cutting edge by using the more advanced techniques described and taught elsewhere.
- **Who knows?** As famous baseball manager Yogi Berra once said, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." You may not have a specific reason for publishing on the Web, but that shouldn't stop you. You may figure out a good reason after you have a little Web experience under your belt. Start simple, so you can score an early success in getting a basic Web page up, and then go from there.

Don't spend too much time on design

Designing a Web page is unlike designing any other kind of publication, because you don't have as much control over the precise appearance of a Web page as you do with other types of publications. Different network connection speeds, browsers, screen sizes, and font and other settings within a browser vary so much that users can have very different experiences with your Web page. Some people may (for example) bring up your page on a personal digital assistant, laptop, Web-connected TV, or mobile phone.

Big issues for big sites

This book focuses on the needs of people who create a single Web page or a small Web site, and who do so on their own. Larger sites, or sites that need to be put up quickly or changed rapidly, need to have additional people working on them.

If you want to create a larger site down the road, start thinking now about what resources may be available to put into it. How many people in your company or other organization work on advertising, public relations, and marketing? How many people question whether those jobs are real work? (Just kidding — the author is a marketer, among other things!)

You may reasonably expect your company to re-target some of its advertising, marketing, and PR resources to support a presence on the Web. And what about sales? Some portion of your company's sales effort is likely to be or become Web-based, necessitating a suitable up-front commitment to bring returns down the road.

Or your company may already suffer from Web burnout. Classic symptoms of Web burnout include massive early investment to create a beautiful site, months of failure to update or maintain the site, followed by finger-pointing about who wasted all that money. Usually the problem is that no one set goals for the site, so no one managed the site's design and construction with those specific goals in mind. Companies often designate too few financial and human resources for maintenance and improvement of the site. If this scenario has happened in your company, you know the problems that result, so be sure to establish clear goals for your own Web efforts.

The most important element in adopting any new technology for business is a successful pilot project. As someone creating a smallish Web site, you're developing important skills and knowledge about the all-important convergence of your business's needs with the Web's opportunities. Set specific goals, strive to meet them, and record both your problems and your successes. By doing so, you position yourself to justify further investment of resources as the Web grows in importance for your company.

With the latest versions of HTML, controlling more aspects of your Web page's appearance is possible. Advanced sites, such as amazon.com, use many different aspects of HTML, as well as programming languages such as JavaScript, to create dense, rich layouts more like a magazine than a typical Web page. However, some aspects of the newest versions of HTML are not yet standard across different Web browsers. In this book, I stick with HTML 4.0, which works the same way for nearly all Web users.

Keep your design simple and don't spend too much time on it initially. A simpler design is more likely to work for everyone — and be easier to update as well. Then improve the design as you find out more about Web publishing and more about how people use your page.

Put the good stuff first

Imagine the Web as a giant magazine rack and the person surfing the Web as someone scanning the front covers of all those magazines. People who see your Web page decide whether to stay at your site — or go elsewhere — based largely on what they see when your page first comes up.

If your purpose is to provide information or links, put that information first. For example, to create a site that provides information about a company, make getting contact information — your company name, address, phone number, and fax number — very easy. To create a personal site that is attractive to potential employers, make clear what employment field you're in right at the top of your Web page and make your résumé easy to access.

If your purpose is to draw people into your site to entertain them, educate them, or expose them to messages from advertisers — or to do all of these things at once — then the first part of the page should make a strong impression and invite the user to go further into your site. Figure 1-5 shows the Fabrik home page, certainly one that catches your attention, located at the following URL: `www.fabrik.com`.

Fabrik Provides Storage, Memory & Next Generation Web Services - Windows Internet Explorer
http://www.fabrik.com/
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
About Fabrik | Contact | Support | News
fabrik
sharing storage backup memory buy
WE'RE STORAGE 2.0
SHARING | CONNECTING | PROTECTING
WELCOME TO STORAGE 2.0
Fabrik offers a network of products and services, interwoven as never before to transform the way you store, protect, manage, share and access all of your most important stuff.
FABRIK ULTIMATE BACKUP
GET 2GB FREE
INTRODUCING THE PRO SERIES
SHARE THE FUN
Get more out of your photos, videos, music and enjoy them everywhere, online.
learn more >
STORE SMARTER
Ultra fast hard drive storage for the home, the pro and for anyone on the go.
learn more >
BACK UP LIKE A PRO
Fabrik Ultimate Backup™ works like no other solution with always-on protection.
learn more >
MOVE FASTER
Get better performance out of your computer with certified memory upgrades.
learn more >
Sharing | Storage | Backup | Memory | About Fabrik | Contact | Support | News
© 2008 Fabrik Inc. and SimpleTech, Inc. Terms & Conditions - Privacy Policy
Done
Internet
100%

Figure 1-5: Fabrik connects Web users to fast storage.

But, like the Fabrik Web page, your home page also should help people who seek a quick "hit" of information; they're more likely to come back later if you don't waste their time during their first visit.

Think twice about download times

Putting lots of graphics in your pages is time-intensive for you because creating or finding good graphics and placing them appropriately in your Web page can take a great deal of time and effort. Graphics are also time-intensive for those who surf your site because they can take a long time to download.

Many people are ignoring this concern these days because they (and many of their users) are on broadband, so even large images load quickly. There are three problems with making this assumption:

- Much broadband service has inconsistencies and hiccups that slow speeds at particular times, making that large file download crawl.
- Even a "fast" download can never be fast enough. A 3-second wait is still annoying, and unnecessarily so if trimming the image size could have taken the wait entirely away.
- There are still some dialup users out there, and a graphic, say, 1 MB in size, can take several minutes to download on a dialup connection. If you impose this wait, you can unknowingly drive some of your users nuts and put them off your site entirely.

So plan to use *spot graphics* (small images that download quickly) at first. Think twice before creating large clickable image maps or attractive opening graphics like those you find on the sites of large companies, such as General Motors or Apple. If you do use an opening graphic, keep the file size under 20 K or so. See Chapters 2 and 5 for details on the efficient use of graphics, whether they're design elements on your site or stored photos on Flickr.

There has been a good deal of coverage in the computer press, and even in mainstream newspapers and news magazines, about ongoing efforts to make faster access available to ordinary users. But for all the talk about cable modems, Digital Subscriber Line (DSL), and other up-to-date techniques, nearly half of home users in the United States are still on 56 Kbps or slower modems — with even more dialup users in most other countries. (Business users are typically on faster connections.) So ignore the hype — the speed at which the average person accesses the Web is still moving upward gradually, not leaping ahead. For now, be conservative in how much data you put in each page, and test the download times of your pages over a modem-based connection before you publish them.

Know your audience

According to Web researchers, Web users overwhelmingly speak English as either a first or second language. Consequently, the great majority of Web content, Web creation tools, and Web browsers use the English language. More than fifteen years after the birth of the Web — which happened in Switzerland, where there are three official languages, none of them English — the English-speaking world is still considered the "center of gravity" for Web access. This situation will gradually change as other countries catch up to Web penetration in the United States.

Why are people online? Surveys indicate that the top reasons people use the Web are for information-gathering, entertainment, education, work, "time-wasting," and shopping. Which of these purposes do you intend for your site to serve? How do you appeal to people who are online? How do you help them find you? The answers to these questions can help you enhance the appeal and usefulness of your site.

Finally, what kind of browsers are your users running? Surveys indicate that over 90 percent of Web users run Microsoft Internet Explorer; most of the rest use Mozilla Firefox. Both of these browsers (and most others that make up the remaining user base) support graphics, tables, and Cascading Style Sheets — an advanced layout feature. Nearly all users run their browsers with graphics turned on (which doesn't mean that they appreciate waiting for complex images to load — unless those images are *very* cool!).

A still-small-but-increasing percentage of Web access is via "sub-PC" devices such as advanced cellphones. That means relatively tiny screens and slow (and expensive) connections. For more on this kind of Internet use, see *Mobile Internet For Dummies* by Michael O'Farrell, et al, 2008.

Use "text bites"

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, when preparing a Web site, less is more. Saying something with less text makes users more likely to read and remember it. A *text bite* is like a sound bite — it's a short, clearly written piece of text that makes a single point.

Text bites are especially important on the Web because reading from a computer screen is physically less comfortable than reading from a printed page. People tend to end their Web sessions after too much reading. You need to shoehorn your messages into the limited amount of reading time people will devote to your Web site.

Although you can overuse text bites, they're very important in Web-page design. Text bites help you convey as much information as possible in the limited amount of time users spend looking at each Web page. And they help you balance the basic elements of Web page design: text, links, and graphics.

If you want to put long documents on the Web, consider rewriting them as a series of text bites. If rewriting them is too much work to be practical, at least create short, punchy text for navigation and for introductory paragraphs to the long documents. Within a long document, add headers to break up the flow of text and provide pointers on your Web site to key areas within the document. Without such guidance, users may well give up in frustration without reaching the information they're looking for.

Look at sites you like

Look at sites you like and at sites whose purposes are similar to your own. What's good about them? What's not? Imitate successful elements — without copying, which would be a violation of ethics as well as copyright laws — and avoid unsuccessful models. As the development of your site progresses, keep checking it against the sites you previously identified and widen your search to get additional ideas — what not to do as well as what to do.

Few original ideas exist on the Web, so it's no big deal if your initial site contains one or two new ideas at best. The rest of your site may echo things readers have already seen, and you're still better off if your site brings to mind other good sites, rather than bad ones. (But be careful: If you start yelling "Bad site! Bad site!" at your computer screen and swatting it with a rolled-up newspaper, you may not have a working Internet connection much longer.)

Plan for ongoing improvements

As you plan and implement your initial Web page, you will, no doubt, find yourself creating a "To Do" list of things that you can't fit into the original site but want to add later, when time allows. (Creating this list for later use is great protection against trying to create a supersite right off the bat, getting stuck in the creation process, and never getting to a point where you can actually publish your first Web page.) This list is the start of a plan for ongoing improvements.

Some things you put in a Web site need to be kept current. For example, if your business Web page shows your company's quarterly results, be ready to update it quickly when the next quarter's results come out. If it lists company officers, update it as soon as a change takes place. (Unless you're one of the people changed — and then it's your successor's problem!)

Web-site information that is obviously out of date is one of the quickest ways to leave a bad impression of you or your organization or company; it steers visitors right away from your Web site. For business, an out-of-date site can cost you customers.

Not only do you want to update the Web site, but you also want to avoid using "Under Construction" signs and otherwise apologizing for things that aren't there yet. *Everything* on the Web is under construction, which is half the fun of using the Web and creating pages for it in the first place. You get only one chance to make a first impression, and an "Under Construction" sign doesn't count in your favor.

Decide how you define success

Before you design and create your Web page, define what you believe can make it a success. For an initial effort, simply putting up something on the Web that clearly conveys basic information is probably enough. You may just need an online reference point for people who need to get in touch with you by phone or by mail, or want to know a bit more about you or your business.

For follow-up work, get more specific. Are you trying to reach a certain number of people or a certain type of people? Will measuring *page views* — the number of times that people look at one page from your site — be enough, or do you need some other measure of response, such as having site visitors send e-mail or call an 800 number? Do you want to create a cutting-edge site full of bell-and-whistle features like fancy graphics and animation — and if so, are you willing to invest the time and money to make this site happen? Talk to people who do advertising and marketing in the real world, as well as to people who work on the Web; get a sense of what goals they set and how they measure success in meeting their goals.